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MURIEL'S DREAMLAND.

MURIEL'S REVERIE.

MURIEL'S DREAMLAND:

A Fairy Tale;

BY

MRS. J. W. BROWN, M.S.F.A.,

WITH

ILLUSTRATIONS BY THE AUTHORESS AND HER DAUGHTER,

ALBERTA BROWN.

BIBLIOTHECA BODLEIANA

GRIFFITH AND FARRAN,

SUCCESSORS TO NEWBERY AND HARRIS,

ST. PAUL'S CHURCHYARD, LONDON.

MDCCCLXXI.

250. y. 223.

LONDON:

PRINTED BY RANKEN AND CO., DRURY HOUSE,

ST. MARY-LE-STRAND, W.C.

ILLUSTRATIONS.

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MURIEL'S DREAMLAND.

CHAPTER I.

Bright Fairyland! its golden bowers,
Its tiny elves, and jewell'd flowers,
All rise in view!

IN a quiet valley, surrounded by vast mountains, where rushing streams dash among the rocks, making sweet melodies, that stir the heart and call forth poems, dwelt bright-haired Muriel; beauteous amid the beautiful; in the blue depths of her thoughtful eyes, there seemed a world beyond, unknown to

ordinary children, but not unfelt; for when she wandered into the village, they would cease their noisy play, and, drawing aside, would whisper, "This is Muriel." They felt as if an angel had passed by, and were silent for a brief moment. She was a solitary child, and would recline for hours upon the rocks wrapped in thought, creating endless visions from her own strange fancy. The Fairies loved Muriel, and watched over her, and, finding she was lonely on earth, obtained their Queen's consent to carry her with them to Fairy-land. Muriel was fond of reading about her friends the Fairies, and at the moment they appointed to take her she had thrown aside her book, longing to be with them,

and was so lost in thought that, for a time, she did not hear the soft sounds of melodious music that were surrounding her, mingled with the rustling of many wings and the sweet perfume of myriads of flowers. At length her ears and eyes became opened; she observed a misty veil of various colours approaching, which gradually took the form of thousands of tiny creatures, more beautiful than even her imagination had ever created. They formed a glittering ring; and in their midst two large swans, bound by chains of silver to an opal car, appeared. The Fairies, taking the wondering Muriel gently in their arms, placed her in the car. The swans then spread their large

white wings, and all sailed far, far away, showering sweet-scented flowers around, and chanting in silvery tones—

"We have sought thee, child of the dreary earth,
To lead thee to realms of beauty and mirth,
Where thy angel face and thy golden hair
Will rival our loveliest Fairy's there.
We'll make thee a couch of a passion flow'r,
And rock thee to sleep in a golden bow'r:
While every wish of thy heart shall be
By our people granted so lovingly."

Muriel had been too much accustomed to think of the Fairies as her friends to feel any fear, or even much surprise, so she looked at them with bright and happy smiles, and opened her large blue eyes to their utmost extent, that she might

not lose any of the beauties she knew they were going to show her.

They soon approached a magnificent forest. The foliage was dazzling with gems; large flowers, composed of gold, silver, and precious stones, lifted their lovely heads in glorious profusion, the waving of whose stems produced faint sounds of exquisite music. Upon looking intently, Muriel perceived that every flower was the abode of a Fairy. In the centre of this brilliant forest was a splendid golden palace, with diamond windows and wide emerald steps. The swans, who seemed to know their duty without guidance, alighted at the entrance of the

palace. Muriel was lifted from the car, and conducted through a spacious hall; she ascended a golden staircase, and was led into the presence of the King and Queen. Upon first advancing, she was so dazzled that her eyes fell before the beauty of their countenances and the brilliant colours of their apparel. Upon raising them, she beheld with amazement that all the royal family were the size of mortals, which distinguished them entirely from the other Fairies, who were tiny creatures. The floor of the palace was crystal, and springing from the centre, as though growing out of water, were immense groups of lilies, the flowers forming couches, upon which the royal

family reposed. The two Fairies who had led Muriel into the presence bent their heads, folded their bright wings, and stood motionless. After a short silence, the Queen, in musical tones, addressed Muriel thus:

"Welcome to our fair realms, sweet Muriel; we have long watched over thee, and pitied thy lonely life: here thou shalt have merry companions, and be one of our own dear children."

She then desired her son and daughter, who were young, like Muriel, to protect her, and show her the wonders of Fairy-land. They told her their names were

Goldencrest and Silverbelle; and when she observed the lovely waves of auburn hair that covered the Prince's head, and his sister's silver locks hanging almost to her feet, she could understand the reason they were so called.

Muriel felt immediately that she should love them. Taking her by the hand, they led her to a deep, still pool, upon whose bank stood a magnificent weeping willow of pure gold. Its spreading branches, trailing upon the mossy ground, were reflected in the silver lake, and formed a pleasant retreat. Around its stem twined a gigantic passion-flower, the leaves of which were shaped into couches,

rocked gently by a continual breath of air; whilst the Fairy music was ever, ever faintly sighing around the stems.

This was to be Muriel's home. She clasped her hands in wonder and delight; then she and Silverbelle sat upon the mossy bank, their arms entwined, while Goldencrest related the wonders of Fairy-land, its delights and pleasures. He told her, however, that all was not so fair as where they dwelt, which was called the Golden Valley; beyond were lands in which abode wicked Sprites, whose delight was to torment all dwellers on earth, bringing to them sickness, hunger, and sin. This was the Black Forest. The

inhabitants of the Golden Valley were often employed in endeavouring to relieve the distresses caused by these evil spirits, who were so powerful that comparatively little good could be done; nothing, in fact, unless the Fairies procured some water from a Silver Fountain which lay beyond the Black Country, and was perpetually guarded by the Sprites. All this Goldencrest related to Muriel as she reclined in Silverbelle's arms by the tranquil pool. He told her that their store of silver rain was quite exhausted, and that he must pass through dangers of many kinds to renew it ready for Christmas time, when they always visited the earth, for the evil Sprites were then par-

ticularly active in increasing the troubles of mortals, and especially of the poor.

Muriel, who loved and pitied the poor so much that she had often shed tears on earth for their sorrows, begged that she might accompany them on their next journey, to which they gladly assented. So they gave her wings like their own, and taught her to use them perfectly; and the three became firm friends, the gentle Silverbelle clinging to Muriel as a sister, and Goldencrest every hour showing them fresh beauties.

They ascended above the clouds, and saw the wonders of the stars; they

descended to the depths of the ocean, explored the coral caves, and gathered the treasures of the deep, and Muriel was amazed at the glories she continually beheld. Thus time passed, until Golden-crest declared he must no longer delay his perilous journey into the Black Country. His two friends became very sad, and trembled with fear when he named the hour for his departure.

At length the time arrived; he clothed himself in flexible armour, so beautifully fashioned that it would turn the points of his enemies' weapons; he buckled a sharp sword by his side, and slung a crystal gourd over his shoulder to contain

the precious liquid, thus leaving his arms free; then, bidding them a tender adieu, he spread his light wings and soared over the trees towards the Black Forest. For some distance the Golden Valley sparkled beneath him, and bright Fairies continually shot past; but, after a time, the country became gloomy, and the air so thick, that Goldencrest had much difficulty in breathing, and, instead of the melodious music of Fairyland, horrible and discordant noises were heard. Having made this journey many times before, he flew on swiftly until he came to a fiery pass between two black mountains. A shower of burning rain was falling, through which he must venture,

there being no other road. Throwing his wide mantle over his head, he dashed swiftly through the pass, and, although scorched and tired, he alighted on the other side in safety. Wild, mocking laughter resounded in the air, and ugly Sprites appeared pointing at him as he sat resting after the trial; but brave Goldencrest cared not for pain if he could only accomplish his mission. On he sped; and as he proceeded the darkness became thicker and the air more foul. He knew by these signs he was approaching the "Howling Cave."

He groped his way (for it was now quite dark) until he found the entrance,

although the dreadful sounds which proceeded from it might have guided him, for the noise was deafening: cries, shouts, screams, in every tone of agony, were heard there; and, as he staggered on, large stones rolled before him, many of them striking and bruising him, and Goldencrest was almost distracted before he emerged from the cavern. But he still hastened on, and soon the entrance to the Silver Fountain came in view.

In strong light, which appeared more dazzling from the late darkness, stood two massive silver gates, rising high into the sky. On one side hung a silver horn. Rocks of brilliant colours enclosed

the Fairy Fountain; crystal icicles of most fantastic form were suspended from every point, so that the whole face of the rocks seemed ever dripping with sparkling water.

A troop of Sprites here awaited him. Grasping his sword firmly, and wrapping his mantle tightly round the gourd, he attacked his enemies with fierce and desperate blows. His armour protected him greatly, or their numbers must have overpowered him.

Long did the battle last, and many times was Goldencrest thrust back, even when he had his hand on the horn and

thought all was safe; but at last he contrived to raise it to his lips and blow a long and loud blast. Instantly the gates were flung wide open and hundreds of tiny arrows discharged at the Sprites, who, with howls of pain, flew into the depths of their forest, leaving Goldencrest faint and wounded, but alone, by the entrance.

Then the Spirit of the Fountain approached, clad in silver tissue, with a bright star on her forehead, and, taking his hand, chanted these words as she led him through the gates:

"Enter, Fairy, brave and good;
Thou hast many ills withstood.

Fill thy gourd with magic rain,
Cure for mortal hearts in pain.
When thou see'st a weary head,
Or a heart whose joy has fled,
Let a drop of water rest
On the mortal thus opprest;
Ease from care shall so be giv'n,
Sickness from the frame be driv'n.
Then welcome to the Magic Cave,
And fill thy gourd, oh! Fairy brave."

Taking him to a deep pool, she bade him plunge in, when all his wounds would be healed, and his strength restored. After doing as she directed, they proceeded together to the fountain, with whose magic drops he filled his gourd. She would not allow him to depart alone, but sent an army of Water-sprites to keep

THE SPIRIT OF THE FOUNTAIN.

off the evil ones. They remained with him until he arrived at the Howling Cave, when he bade them adieu, and entered alone, only thinking now of protecting his precious gourd, for he feared that some of the stones might break it. But, fortunately, he passed both dangers without injury, and arrived safely in Fairyland, where he found Muriel and Silverbelle anxiously awaiting him, and whose joy was great at his return.

CHAPTER II.

The little childish tender heart,
From which the tears so freely start,
Is soon consol'd.

THE Christmas time of the earth drew near, and the three friends prepared for their journey. They tied silver scarves about them, which rendered them invisible, and each carried a bottle of the wonderful liquid, one drop of which would lighten the heart of a sorrowing mortal, and give strength to continue the battle of life. When they

arrived on earth they agreed to separate, that they might the better spread the benefits they could confer.

Silverbelle, whose tender and delicate nature made her shrink from entering the homes of the very poor, passed through many houses ere she found any distress sufficiently great to cause her to spend a drop of her precious liquid.

It was Christmas morning: good Fairies were hovering about, showering bright rain upon mortals, and taking from their hearts many evil feelings that the Sprites had placed there. All were preparing in some way for the great festival; hanging the

merry holly about the rooms, and laughing under graceful branches of mistletoe; the children especially seemed not to know what tears or sorrows were; and Silverbelle began to think the world a much happier place than she had fancied, and that her precious drops were not wanted.

At length she arrived at a large mansion, to which she was attracted by hearing sounds of weeping. Hastening to the chamber from whence they proceeded, she discovered a little child who had thrown himself upon the floor. With tangled hair, and tears streaming down his flushed cheeks, he was exclaiming, in piteous accents, "Oh! mamma, my own mamma,

come back to your little Willie!" He dashed his head upon the floor, and sobbed so violently, that the tender heart of Silverbelle was melted, and she determined to pause here, and ease the sorrows of this poor little mortal.

Waving her wings over him with a soothing motion, until he became more composed, she went to discover the cause of his affliction, which she soon learned from the servants, who were feasting below regardless of his trouble—for the Sprites had been at work in that house, showering black rain upon all, chilling hearts which should at least have been warm on that day.

The child's father and mother had both died in one short week, leaving their beloved little Willie sad and alone. Strangers had taken possession of the house, who cared nothing for the orphan, looking upon him as a burden, not seeking to soothe his grief. They had gone to spend the Christmas with friends, leaving the desolate child to cry out for his lost mother, and weep unavailing tears. Silverbelle looked into the hearts of the servants, but could find none kindly enough to spend a drop upon; besides, some of the Sprites were hovering above their heads, and would not let her approach. She left them shouting and drinking, while into every glass the Sprites

were dropping black rain, making them each moment more furious, until they became like raving madmen.

Gentle Silverbelle, who trembled at these sights, hastened from the room with drooping wings, yet full of pity for these lost mortals. Descending, then, to the lower rooms, she found a poor hard-working woman, who had been engaged for a few hours to save the idle servants trouble. She was at that moment tying on her bonnet, after collecting a few scraps that she was allowed to take away: her face, though lined with care, was full of kindness, and Silverbelle determined to make this poor woman the means of

giving comfort to the little child above. Carefully opening her bottle, she allowed one drop to fall upon the woman's head. The effect was instantaneous: her face brightened with a smile; the care-worn look left it; and she exclaimed cheerfully, as she gathered up the pieces, "Well, it's a poor dinner for Christmas, but, somehow, I feel happy, and as though some blessing were upon me to-day!"

Silverbelle hastened to Willie, and led him to meet the woman as she was going out. He stood on the stairs before her with his tear-stained face lifted to hers. He was now pale and trembling, and the

motherly heart of the kind woman went out to the forlorn orphan. She took him in her arms, and asked him why he grieved. He told her, in touching language, his simple tale. "My little one!" she exclaimed, "will you come home with me, and play with my bairns; it will be better for you than staying in this wicked house?" Willie said, "Ah, yes! take me from this wicked house." She then told one of the servants what she was going to do, and they left together. Hastening along the frosty streets, with the snow beating upon their heads, they turned up a narrow court, and arrived at a mean-looking cottage. Opening the door, she was immediately surrounded by a troop

of merry children, who exclaimed all at once, "Look, mother, what the Fairies have sent us!" and there, to her great surprise, hanging before a large fire, was a fine piece of beef, which her husband, with red and scorched face, was carefully basting. She expected to find a few miserable cinders in the grate, and nothing for their Christmas dinner but the pieces she had collected. It did, indeed, seem like some enchantment. Her husband, as soon as the children would allow him to be heard, said, "Dear Mary, we have, indeed, to be thankful, for, no sooner had you gone this morning than my kind Master, knowing we had sickness in the house, and were very poor this Christmas,

sent a large basket of good things and plenty of coals to cook them." "May blessings rest on him," said the thankful wife. "I felt so happy this morning, that I was sure some luck would come to us; and I almost believe this little one has brought it," and she pulled little Willie from behind the folds of her dress, where he had hidden himself. "Oh! what a beautiful little fellow," said the children, crowding round him. "The Fairies must also have sent him. Shall we keep him with us always, mother?" "No, my dears," said the woman; "but he is in trouble, so we must try to comfort him."

She then explained to her husband,

and he was glad she had brought him home. Little Willie soon began to laugh with the rest, for, being good-hearted children, they all tried to make him happy.

In the meantime, the mother went into the next room, and gently approached a small bed, where lay almost the shadow of a little girl, with brown eyes wide open, but without the light of reason. "Ah!" she sighed, "could my pretty Annie have enjoyed this day, I should be perfectly happy; but, alas! there is no hope of that." The poor little thing, who was the pet of the family, had been playing in the street some weeks before,

when a heavy weight had fallen upon her head, and left her insensible. She had remained in that state since, and they began to despair of her ever recovering her reason. After giving her sick child some broth, the mother busied herself about preparing the dinner, setting each of the children to do something; even little Willie was put on a stool by the fire to watch that the meat did not burn. At length the grand meal was prepared; all noisily took their places round the table. The highest chair was chosen for Willie, to make him look more important; and his pretty chubby face and arms, and soft wavy hair, were duly admired by the rough, yet generous, children around.

The father asked a blessing, and could the kind master who gave the meal have looked in at that moment, he would indeed have been amply rewarded.

Silverbelle, who had been hovering about watching the happy party, now left them, and entered the next room. Resting at the head of the bed, she waved her wings gently over the sick child until her staring eyes gradually closed, as if in a refreshing slumber. Then, taking her precious bottle, she let a drop fall on little Annie's head, and waited for the effect.

Justice had been done to the beef, the

SILVERBELLE'S COMPASSION.

plum-pudding had almost disappeared, and all were resting after their unusual labours, when a faint cry of "Mother!" was heard distinctly through the open doorway. They looked at each other in doubt for a moment, and then the mother, with a cry of "My child! my child!" rushed into the room.

There was little Annie, wan and weak indeed, but conscious, holding out her arms as she used to do. All the others crowded into the room, breathless with hope, and found, indeed, their darling was restored to them, and was able to ask, in whispering tones, what had been the matter with her, and to

tell them she had dreamed that a beautiful fairy, with large wings and silver hair, had rocked her to sleep.

How happy were they all now, declaring that Willie had brought good fortune, and kissing him again and again.

Annie soon fell asleep, and all the family, full of thankfulness, were sitting round the kitchen fire, speaking softly, fearing to awake her, when a gentle tap came at the outer door. It was opened, and a pretty-looking lady walked in, richly dressed, although in deep mourning, and immediately perceiving Willie, she clasped

him in her arms, and exclaimed, with emotion, "My dead sister's child! Henceforth, for her sake, you shall be mine." Then, turning to the father and mother, she said: "My good friends, I see you have had compassion upon the orphan. Your own kind hearts will reward you. I have come many miles to fetch this dear child, so that he must now bid you farewell; but when next he comes to England he shall not forget to visit his kind friends."

Little Willie was kissed so much in saying good-bye that he almost lost his breath. The lady, as she went out at the door, pressed the mother's hand, and

upon opening it she found a bank-note was left there.

Thus Silverbelle and Willie brought many blessings to that poor home, and for years after they talked of the wonderfully lucky Christmas.

CHAPTER III.

Dark crime ! we look with shudd'ring dread
Where thou thy evil wings hast spread,
And flee away.

GOLDENCREST sought the haunts of vice, where the evil Sprites were most active, for his heart was brave, and he loved to struggle single-handed against a host. Many times during the day, when these evil ones had taken possession of a poor mortal, Goldencrest would rush in among them, and with fierce blows would chase

them away, and pour his healing balm upon the troubled head. He made his way this Christmas Day into the lowest streets of a crowded town, where men and women were drinking together, and dreadful scenes met the eye at every corner. The air about this part was black with Sprites, who were wheeling round and round in frantic joy at causing so much evil; and they revelled in sin and suffering. When Goldencrest came among them they would have attacked him had they dared; but they knew his sword was sharp and powerful, and his courage great. So he poured many silver drops around, and every time one fell the Sprites howled with rage, so that mortals thought it was a

THE FLIGHT OF GOLDENCREST.

wild and stormy night. At length he entered a low tavern, where a dozen degraded men were assembled round a broken table playing cards. All were fierce, bad men, eager for gain, ready to commit any crime to secure the dirty coin which was passed about. Two of the number particularly arrested Goldencrest's attention. They were playing together a little apart. One was a large, coarse, brutal-looking man; the other, though marked by vice, had handsome features, and seemed as if he might have been turned to better things. The large man was called Bertram, the smaller Stephen. Bertram was evidently winning greatly, and every time he secured an-

other coin he gave a loud and insulting laugh, which roused the other almost to madness. At length, with trembling hand, Stephen's last shilling was laid upon the table, and, like the rest, it passed into his adversary's pocket. Then his rage could be withheld no longer, and he exclaimed, in passionate tones, "Cheat and villain! I will have revenge!" In a moment Bertram's fist was in his face, and he went reeling against the wall. Then the Sprites danced and whirled around, and were so strong that Goldencrest could not, with all his efforts, approach. The man who had been struck leaned against the wall, sick and giddy from the force of the blow; while Bertram, laughing loudly,

left him, well satisfied with his evening's gains.

After a few moments passed in jeering Stephen, the other men, who had started up on hearing the noise, resumed their play, while he sat in a corner, with his bruised face upon his hands, brooding over the insult and his losses, and planning revenge.

The evening wore away, but still he never moved; one by one the men reeled out into the winter's night, until some half-dozen only were left, who, folding their arms on the table, and letting their heavy heads fall upon them, gradually dropped

asleep. Among these was Bertram, all unconscious of the doom so near. Stephen, from his dark corner, watched him with eager eyes, whose fierce light was terrible to behold. All that was good had died out of his face, and the evil alone was left. Now did the Sprites keep strict watch over him that Goldencrest should not approach; they thought he was theirs for ever, and Goldencrest's wings drooped, for he feared he should have to tell Silverbelle and Muriel a sad tale of how his time had that night been wasted. Patiently did Stephen wait, with clenched hands and frowning brows, watching every movement of Bertram. At length all was still, save the heavy breathing of the

sleeping men and the rustling of the Sprites' wings, which sounded like rain dashing against the window-panes.

Half-an-hour went by, and still no movement from Stephen. The Sprites got impatient, and Goldencrest began to hope, when, stealthily, his hand crept to a large knife lying upon the table. He grasped it; and slowly, softly, he stole to the sleeping Bertram; then strong and fierce was the battle between Goldencrest and the Sprites. Sometimes he would advance a little way, when they would rush upon him in a body and thrust him to the other side of the room. Stephen had reached the sleeping man; his arm

was raised to strike, and the terrible knife gleamed in the air, when Goldencrest, faint and exhausted, with a last effort, dashed the Fairy bottle with all his force across the room. The whole of its contents fell full in the face of Stephen. Like lightning the knife dropped from his hand, and, with a wild look, he cried, "Am I mad? Oh, father! oh, mother!" and rushed with frantic haste from the house.

The Sprites gave a long howl of rage and disappointment, which fell upon the ears of the sleeping men like the roar of a tempest, some of whom raised their heads for a moment, and muttered, "What a terrible storm."

Out into the wild night fled the conscience-stricken man, the snow beating upon his bare head, and the wind lifting the tangled hair from his heated brow. On, on, he rushed, sighing, groaning, and at times flinging his arms wildly in the air, so that the few passengers he met stared wonderingly after him until he was out of sight.

In a small but pleasant house, on that same night, sat an old man and woman. The room was cheerfully furnished; a bright fire burned in the grate; and it was evident by the comforts around that poverty was not the cause of the trouble stamped upon the brows of both. A

weary, care-worn look was in each face, as if the happiness of life had departed. Alas! such was really the case. They had married late in life, and an only child had been born to them, upon whom they lavished all the wealth of their affection, indulging him in every whim, and foolishly sacrificing all their own wishes to gratify his. He was a beautiful and winning child, and for a time his wilful nature and bursts of passion were soothed and passed over; but as his years increased, friends began to shake their heads and foretell trouble to the foolish parents, who never denied anything to their spoilt child. As he arrived at manhood, their fears were more than realised;

he became a selfish, passionate man, and was then led into bad company, where he soon learned to drink and gamble, while his heartbroken parents had no power to restrain him. Thus he went on from bad to worse, in idleness and sin, until the mild temper of his father was roused against him, and frequent quarrels arose. One night the old man, tried beyond all endurance, forbade him the house, and told him never to return until he could come in a humble spirit, asking forgiveness. Then the son, laughing loudly, declared that never should he be brought so low; and heedless of his mother's tears and entreaties, he dashed from the house.

Four years had now elapsed, and no tidings had arrived of the prodigal—four weary years of bitter grief to those fond parents, whose hearts were bound up in their son. Every means had been used to find him, but all in vain; and their heads had become white, and their faces worn with care. They sat now, this Christmas night, listlessly looking into the fire, and thinking—ah! how sadly—of their absent son.

"He must be dead," sighed the poor mother, "or he would never let another Christmas pass without coming: he would surely remember how we ever strove to make him enjoy this day." "Alas!" said

the father, "that I should ever have sent him away; better, a thousand times, to have endured anything, than that he should go into the world, with no one to advise or comfort him."

Thus did this poor old couple bewail and mourn over their ungrateful son, blaming themselves instead of him, and still willing to sacrifice all for his sake. Thus they remained, relating anecdotes of his childhood, praising his beauty, and never wearying of repeating his name, until midnight had passed; and still they lingered by the fireside. Suddenly a violent knocking at the street door resounded through the house. The old

people started from their seats, and, always thinking of the same subject, murmured, "Can it be he?" Taking a candle from the table, they went with beating hearts to the door. Keeping the chain up, the old man asked, "Who is there?" Then, in well-known accents, came the words, "Father! mother! receive once more your penitent son; forgive and bless him." Wildly did the parents unfasten the chain, and, sobbing with eager joy, they clasped him fainting in their arms.

CHAPTER IV.

The waves dash high, the spirit of the storm
Is now abroad, his wild, black form
Hurling destruction.

UR pretty Muriel felt lonely and timid on first parting from Goldencrest and Silverbelle; but the hope of doing good gave her courage, and for many miles she flew quickly through the bright clear air, merrily singing, ere the bleak, wintry trees of the earth met her view, their myriads of weird arms, tipped with snow, stretching

into the cold gray sky. Then the leafless branches recalled to her mind the troubles of mortals struggling against poverty, sickness, and hunger. Her tender heart became sad, and, clasping still closer her tiny bottle, she thought that, even without the aid of kindly Fairies and the precious Silver Rain, if all who had the power did some good on this holy day, how great would be the change. Thus musing, she proceeded until smoke rising from some distant trees led her to a large city on the sea-coast. There fine mansions, containing every luxury, stood almost side by side with miserable hovels, where want and care stalked hand in hand among the people. Many Fairies were

seeking, like herself, to cheer them, oft-times alighting on the children's cradles, kissing their rosy lips, smoothing their golden hair, and whispering merry dreams into their baby ears. At others, hovering over the arm-chairs of the aged, telling of peace beyond the grave, and rest from every care.

Passing on her way, Muriel was soon attracted by the slight figure of a girl sitting on a door-step in a weary attitude, a basket of oranges by her side. Long dark hair fell upon her shoulders, and the anxious look in her soft brown eyes was piteous to behold. A lady was also observing her from a window with great

interest. In a few moments a servant came to the door with some pence and a piece of cake. The child took them thankfully, but, instead of eating the cake, as was natural, she carefully put it into her pocket, and running eagerly to a baker's shop, purchased a small loaf, and hastened away.

Muriel followed her into a room at the top of a wretched house, where a pretty baby, about three years old, sat shivering by an empty grate. It was wrapped in clean, but miserably poor, clothing, while a little bell seemed its only amusement. The girl rushed into the room, exclaiming, "Darling Tiny, see

what sissy has brought!" and placed the cake in the child's hands without keeping a morsel for herself; then, after kissing the pretty face almost passionately, she sat upon the floor eagerly devouring her bread. The little one laughed with delight until the cake was finished, when she complained of being cold, and begged to be taken in her sister's arms, who folded her lovingly in her own ragged shawl, and, nestling together, they both fell asleep, all their troubles for the moment forgotten.

With the exception of a broken table and chair, there was not a vestige of furniture in the room. No toys; no comforts;

not even a bed: but it contained something far more priceless than all these—which we might seek in vain in many palaces — a truly unselfish heart — this starving child of fourteen gathering her baby sister so tenderly to her loving heart. What gems—what riches—could be weighed with this and not found wanting? They were the children of a sailor, who left them at this seaport town about two years before, with an ailing mother, expecting to return in a few months; but storms arose that made every sailor's wife tremble, and soon news arrived that the ship was wrecked, and all on board had perished. The sickly wife had no strength to bear up against these

MOTHERLESS.

terrible tidings. For a few weeks she sat silently by the window looking out upon the sea, a little needlework in her hand, too heartbroken to do much; from time to time lifting her weary head to watch the rolling waves, frequently heaving deep sighs, especially when vessels arrived. The eldest girl nursed her quietly and tenderly, taking charge entirely of the baby; but she drooped rapidly; and one evening, when the little nurse came home, the usual wan smile of greeting was not given, and, hastening to her mother's side, she found her eyes still fixed upon the broad ocean, but all her sorrows at an end, and only the desolate children were now to be pitied.

The brave-hearted child struggled against her own grief, knowing that she alone must support them both for the future. Who shall tell of the fears that daily made that young heart tremble as each morning she left the dreary place she called home, uncertain whether the few pence necessary for existence would be earned? Or, as she lay each night, weary and footsore, by her baby-sister's side, how much dearer it became for the very efforts she made for its support? But the child had a face that helped her: innocence and truth were written there; and many a passer-by, struck with the fair page, turned back to give her money and a few kindly words.

But the sailor-father was not dead, and help was near for these children. He had started on his voyage, after bidding his delicate wife adieu, with the hope of promotion in a few months, leaving his little store of money with her, and cheering the last moments they were together by dwelling on the comforts they would be able to enjoy on his return.

For some weeks all went smoothly; but gradually the wind arose, and such a fearful storm raged for two days and nights that the oldest sailors on the vessel declared they had never seen its like. The captain was a brave fellow, and even when he knew

the ship was sinking and all hope gone, gallantly gave his orders with unfaltering voice, and kept the crew from despair until the last moment. But fate was too much for him. Amidst the flashing lightning and deafening thunder, with the rolling billows dashing mountains high, down sank the good ship "Arabian," to rise no more.

For a few moments the vivid lightning flashed upon a hundred upturned faces in all the agonies of a sudden death; in another moment the vivid lightning still flashed, but the faces were no more, the wide ocean had engulfed them. One only had strength to battle

with the giant waves. His presence of mind had enabled him to look around and to discover something that loomed like rocks ahead. In that dreadful moment a blanched face also appeared by his side. It was that of the good captain, and he determined to make every effort to save him as well as himself. Seizing the now lifeless form by the hair, he battled fiercely with the terrible waves, feeling sure, if he could reach the spot that had been revealed to him by the gleaming lightning, they would both be safe for the time.

By great good fortune, just as all hope was leaving him, a wave lifted

them far on high, and in descending they were dashed violently against some hard substance. He clung to it with desperate tenacity, and held on firmly. Wave after wave rolled over him, but yet he clung, until a lull in the storm gave him an opportunity of looking around. The lightning was still his friend, and revealed further on many rocks piled around, showing that land had been gained. After resting for awhile, he made another effort to push forward, and succeeded with desperate exertion in reaching dry land. For a moment he sank exhausted and fainting on the sand; but his brave heart would not allow him to give way when a fellow-creature's life depended on his exertions.

He was shocked, on examining his companion, to find him terribly disfigured by contact with the rocks, and for a long time he despaired of restoring animation. But warmth and life at last returned, and the two bruised and desolate men stood in awful solitude, in the black midnight, the only survivors of the wreck. It seemed as if the elements had worn themselves out in the last burst that sent the doomed ship to destruction, for soon after the raging storm subsided, and the moon shone forth with startling brilliancy, disclosing masses of rolling clouds piled one upon the other in awful grandeur. The two men were overwhelmed with conflicting emotions: thankfulness for their own

preservation, grief for the fate of their companions, and fears for the future. They waited patiently until the red sun arose from its ocean bed, when they wandered inland to explore the country. They found it totally uninhabited, and their only hope was to obtain the notice of some passing ship.

For many weeks they subsisted on wild fruits and herbs, keeping a sharp look-out all day over the sea. At length a large vessel hove in sight, and, with strained eyes and trembling hearts, the half-starved men sought with frantic efforts to attract her attention. They succeeded beyond their expectations, and a

boat was put off to rescue them. The honest sailors showed the greatest kindness; but the vessel was bound for China, and they were compelled to make the long voyage, so that many months elapsed before they could start on their homeward journey.

The captain was a rich man, and, in gratitude for the preservation of his life, settled a pension on his brave preserver, so that he arrived this very Christmas morning a happy man indeed, but for the fears about his wife's health, which he could not shake off. Hastening to the lodging where he had left her, he there heard the sad tidings, and was

directed to the attic, in which his two children were now lying fast asleep upon the hard floor. In a few moments he held them passionately to his manly breast; but sobs that arose for his dead wife choked all words, and, burying his head in his hands, he seemed totally unable to control his grief.

Muriel, looking on at this moment, hastened to pour the healing balm upon his brow. Soon calmer thoughts arose. His eldest daughter, with fond caresses, spoke to him in soothing tones, placing the pretty baby in his arms. As the magic rain took effect, something seemed

to whisper to his bruised heart of the blessings he still possessed in these dear children; of the privations they must have endured without the aid of father or mother, and his capability now of supplying all their wants. A feeling of resignation, after a time, came over him; he listened to his child's account of her mother's calm death, and, sitting with his arms around them, determined to devote his future life to their welfare, as she would have done.

CHAPTER V.

Oh ! send not from thy heart this night
Soft Mercy, in her robes of white,
Knocking for entrance.

MURIEL felt it hard to tear herself from these children, who had interested her so deeply; but, eager to try still further the virtues of the precious silver rain, she flew in the direction of her beloved mountains, whose giant heads were covered with snow. Having far to travel, she was late in arriving. The setting sun threw a

red glory upon the distant peaks, making them look like white-haired kings, with jewelled crowns upon their hoary heads. Deep, deep into the valley flew Muriel. A rushing torrent dashed among the gray and mossy stones, and the stern trees lifted their leafless branches into the red and golden sky. As Muriel gazed she felt that, after all her dreams, Fairyland was not so beautiful as this.

She proceeded to a house of some size, near her own home, where dwelt an old man who was sadly in want of some softening influence to melt his unforgiving heart. As Muriel entered at the door she paused to look at this

hardened man, and, knowing his history, feared that the drops she held in her hand would not be powerful enough for the purpose. Long gray hair was falling about his shoulders, and his cold blue eyes were looking intently in the fire. Thus he remained motionless, while Muriel thought over what she had heard of his past life. There was no sign of rejoicing about the place, no holly upon the walls, no happy faces round the fire, only this stony-hearted old man, resolving never to relent.

He had married when young a beautiful girl of a delicate and timid nature. He was harsh and stern, and she soon

went to her quiet grave without regret, except at leaving a little daughter on earth, with no friend but her stern father, who, she well knew, never forgave a fault. On her death-bed she called him to her side, and begged him to be gentle to the little one. With many tears and prayers she asked him, should his child ever greatly offend him, for her sake, to be forgiving, and to remember that she had no mother's love to bless and guide her. He promised all she desired, for, although he had never been a kind husband, he still loved, and was grieved at losing her. Alas! how had he kept his promise? That child, so fondly

cherished by his dead wife, was now, with her helpless babes, on this bitter Christmas night, in one of his barns, perishing with cold and hunger; and the stern old man was sitting at his comfortable fire, shutting out all pity from his heart.

The child had lived alone with her father, fearing yet loving him, until womanhood. She was always gentle and obedient, and he showed more affection for her than he had ever done for any other human being. All went smoothly until a stranger gained her love, and sought her for a wife; then the father took a strong dislike to her

lover, selfishly wishing to keep her always with him. His obstinate nature appeared, and he declared they should never marry. For years they waited, hoping he would relent, but in vain. At last they married and came to throw themselves at his feet, feeling sure he would soon forgive them. They little knew his heart. He cast them from him with threats and curses; and although ten years had passed, he had not shown the least sign of relenting. They left for a distant land, and his daughter never wearied of writing, from time to time sending long and loving letters, begging for a single line in return. But the stern man threw all her

letters into the fire without reading so much as a word. Ten years they were united, and three children were born to them, when a terrible accident deprived the husband of life in a moment, and left the wife and children penniless. What could she then do but return to him who was still dearly loved? She wrote to tell him of her misfortune, and determination to return home if she had no line from him. She little thought that this letter shared the fate of so many others, and was flung pitilessly unopened into the fire. Not hearing from him, she concluded he would receive her, and started with her children for her mountain home, so fondly remembered

during her absence. Three days ago she arrived, and with a wildly beating heart and trembling steps hastened to her father's door; but he would not see her face. And she heard him, in a loud, harsh voice bid the servant drive that strange woman from the door, for he had no daughter.

"Father, father," she screamed, "have mercy; I am a widow, and cannot give my children bread." But the only answer he returned was, "I have no daughter; drive her away." Oh! what anguish wrung her heart, what tears of agony fell from her eyes as she looked upon her helpless infants! The servants wept

for her, but dared not let her remain; and having no other home, she took shelter in one of her father's barns, where, shivering with cold, and almost starving, they had remained for three weary days, the servants bringing them what food they dared, and denying themselves to feed them: thus were they spending Christmas Day, when Muriel stood in the doorway. After pausing for some moments, thinking with sorrow of these things, she advanced to the old man, and gently poured some drops upon his brow, still doubting if he could relent; but the all-powerful water from the silver fountain was capable of working even this miracle,

for as it fell a vision seemed to rise before him. He saw as in a dream his dying wife, with her wan face and clasped hands, eagerly imploring him to be merciful to their only child; he saw himself (then a young man) weeping bitterly, and promising in broken accents all she desired, even swearing that he would be gentle and forgiving, remembering she had no mother and no friend on earth but himself. He hid his face with his hands; but still the vision rose before him—still his young wife's dying eyes were fixed upon his, and he saw her thin white hands raised entreatingly. He tried to leave his chair; but some spell seemed to

hold him, while dreadful fears came into his mind, that at the great day no mercy would be shown for his sins. A trembling seized his limbs, large drops stood upon his brow, for the eager, mournful face was still there. At length, with a powerful effort, he turned his head from the vision, only to see another even more wonderful, for standing by his side was what seemed to him his own child—his little Ada—just as she stood by her dying mother's bed. She raised her timid eyes to his face, and softly said, "Grandfather, 'blessed are the merciful for they shall obtain mercy.'" Then he awoke from his trance, the vision disappeared, and

he knew that the sweet infant by his side was Ada's child, and not his own. Tears of repentance rained down his furrowed cheeks; he clasped the little one in his arms, and said, bitterly, "Child, I do not deserve mercy, for I have greatly sinned; let us find thy mother."

Muriel had left the old man and sought the barn where his helpless daughter was lying. She had whispered comfort into her ear, and urged her to send the youngest child (so like herself) to seek her grandfather, teaching her what words to repeat. Persuading one of the servants to put her gently into his

room, the child crept unobserved to her grandfather's side, and thus, with Muriel's unseen guidance, appeared to him at the right moment. She now put her little hand confidingly in his, and led him to the barn, where his only child had taken shelter, telling him on the way how cold and hungry they were, and how dear mamma was crying all day long, and striving to keep them warm. "But why," said the little one, "don't you take us into your nice, warm house, grandpapa, where we could feel the fire as well as you?"

Was it only the wintry wind that made the old man tremble, and turn

THE DISCARDED FAMILY.

pale, or did the vision again rise before him? When they arrived at the barn they found the desolate mother and her two children crowding together for warmth, with despair upon their pinched faces.

"Ada," said her father, with a faltering voice, "can you be more merciful than I have been, and forgive me after all I have made you endure? If so, come and be once more my child, to bless my old age, with your gentle care, for this day I am a changed man, and see the error of my ways. She fell upon his neck with loving words of joy and kindness, and in that moment they

were for ever reconciled. Leading them all to the house, he gave orders for Christmas fare to be provided, and nothing spared to make his children welcome; and the old man acknowledged he had never spent such a happy Christmas Day before.

Muriel shed sweet tears upon beholding the good work she had accomplished, and longed to return to Fairy-land, that she might tell her beloved friends of her success, and hear an account of their adventures. The moon, now high in the heavens, shone upon the snowy peaks, and tipped the rushing stream with silver ripples. How beautiful did

Muriel think her native land, with its broad shadows and its tender lights, after the dazzling glare of Fairy-land. She travelled many hours, but the strong wings bore her so easily along that she felt no fatigue.

Upon arriving at the place of meeting she found Goldencrest and Silverbelle anxiously awaiting her. They embraced her tenderly, and proceeded to their favourite bower, where, reclining in Silverbelle's arms, she told her story and heard theirs.

But why do Goldencrest and Silverbelle fade from her sight, and what are those distant cries of "Muriel, dear child, where art thou?" This pale, shadowy moonlight is not the glittering gold of Fairy-land; those dark rocks like frowning giants were never seen there. The cries approach, while distant figures, with flaring torches, search among the rocks. It dawns upon the bewildered child that the Fairies have brought her back to earth, and those are mortal friends seeking her. She calls aloud and tries to rise, but her limbs feel stiff, and will not move. At last they hear her feeble cry, and hasten to take her

tenderly from the damp ground, whispering among themselves, "Poor child! she must have fainted."

She knew no more until she found herself in her little bed at home. For many weeks she lingered between life and death, and visions of Angels took the place of Fairy dreams. One morn, as the rising sun poured its golden beams into her little chamber, the Angels came for Muriel and bore her away to a better home than Fairyland, where she will dwell for ever in unutterable bliss.

In heavenly paths her steps now wend
Where joy and peace will never end
Like Fairy Dreams.

LONDON:
PRINTED BY RANKEN AND CO., DRURY HOUSE,
ST. MARY-LE-STRAND, W.C.